I Samuel 13:8-15, John 2:13-17

“This is serious business”

How many of you were here yesterday for any reason at all, for any part of the day? It was amazing to see the church crawling with people, literally, from the hall to the crawlspace to the tower. I absolutely love seeing how this church is becoming more and more the heart of the burrough. Yesterday, we hosted the L-S idol and it was quite interesting. Kids and adults from all over this region converged here to belt it out. We had a dozen or more men pulling wire to get our infrastructure up to date and be ready for whatever the future may throw at us. Today the youth did a great job promoting Souper Bowl Sunday, make sure if you forgot your can of food that you drop in a dollar or two to help feed the hungry of this county.

And then how about those Scouts? What a tremendous honor it is for us to have been asked to charter troop 1910. I hope we can take even more strides to be exposed to these Scouts and us to be exposed to them. FPC is involved in a whole variety of activity that a lot of us aren’t even aware, like next week’s blanket Sunday.

Both of our Scriptures today speak about the fact that it is serious business being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Don’t get me wrong, I love eating chili and watching the Super Bowl, but what we do in here during this time, should never be trivialized. It is serious business. Our worship of Almighty God defines who we are, but equally defines who God is for us, and that is serious business.

What we are going to see is that Saul worshipped in such a way that he lost his standing before God. Jesus, what he does in Scripture is that he sees how people are changing the worshiop and the setting of the temple so that it is focused on them, and not on God, so he takes matters into his own hands, literally. As we gather with so much going on, we see the table simply adorned and are reminded that what we do here, during this hour is not about us, but about God, and that is serious business.

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When we walked on top of the temple mount it was a bit eerie because there was no temple. Imagine if you will a broad plateau that is about the size of 6 football fields. There are people wandering around and talking about life and bidding their time before they go into the temple. Now, of course, there is a big mosque in the middle of it all, but it still isn’t hard to imagine this place in Jerusalem as the center of the world with the temple, the house of God right in the middle of it.

What was the temple? Let’s set the stage so we can understand why what Jesus does in this Scripture is so important. Solomon built the temple, remember the son of David, about 750 years before Jesus. It experienced some ups and downs and was destroyed a few times, but ever since the time of Solomon, so for over 750 years it was thought by the people of God that this is God’s house, this is where God resides, this is where God lives. Talk about the heart of Jerusalem. This is it.

Now we love this church, we have the utmost respect for the structure and the building. I love learning about what makes it up. I love going up into the tower, getting below the church and looking at the crawl space. We don’t like to see things change much, it rattles us. The crack in the ceiling is a wonderful reminder to us of the change that was necessary in order for us to survive. We have seen a number of improvements, over the next few weeks we will see some others such as a projector and a screen, thanks to the hard work and planning of the sanctuary enhancement ad-hoc committee: Dale Groff, Steve Echternacht, Charlie Lefevre, Jeff Stoltzfus, Don Welk Jr., Leo Petrokonis, Ken Neumann, Mark Feiler. But even as much as we love this church, we don’t believe that God lives here. God lives in each of us, but he doesn’t dwell in this sanctuary.

When Jesus enters Jerusalem on Passover the temple area, that 5 football field plateau area, would have been absolutely packed. Passover was the height of the Jewish religious feasts, much like our Easter in so many different ways. So just as we this church is packed on Easter, so the Temple would have been swarming with thousands and thousands of people. As Jesus enters this temple area he takes one look at the entrance of where people would have gone in to worship, and right in that area where gentiles could have congregated, he sees something he doesn’t like. It would be as if in our entryways as you come into the church there would be people selling livestock for you to, not youth with soup buckets, but people with livestock.

It looked like a market. Sheep, goats, oxen, doves. You see when people went to church they had to present livestock so the priests could make sacrifices on their behalf. It was the only way they could be made right before God. There was nothing wrong with them presenting animals to the priests to be made right before God, in fact, they were required to do so. What they also had to do was take their Roman money that they used out there and change it to the temple sheckels which was all that was accepted in here. So you had livestock with money changers all over the place in order to fulfill the responsibility of the people to worship God in the right way. You get the sense of what was going on?

They were *doing* the right thing, but somehow they and their exigencies had become the focus of the day, and the focus of their worship, but God had been squeezed out. Jesus recognizes this immediately and he is angry. Remember, the temple area is packed and there he is roaming around with a whip, John says he takes the time to make the whip, and he drives out the ox and the sheep. Notice the detail that he just yells at the dove sellers. The dove sellers would have been the poorest of the lot because it was the smallest possible offering. He seems to treat them a bit more humanely.

What amazes me is that as Jesus is teaching this lesson that worship of Almighty God is serious business, and is driving people out and turning over the money all over the ground and creating unmitigated chaos, no one says a mumbling word. They let him do it and he gets away with it. In fact, in vs. 17 we find the key to this entire Scripture and how we can understand even better what Jesus did, his disciples remember the verse from Psalm 69:9 which states that: The Zeal for the house of the Lord consumed me. Jesus’ love for worship of His Father is what defined him. But what I love is if you read even more of Psalm 69 what do you find in vs. 8? “I have been a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother’s children. It is zeal for your house that has consumed me.” It wasn’t his family that defined Jesus, right women who are studying James. You know that.

It was the love for the worship of His father. Jesus was an outcast in his family. He is called crazy by them, they say he has lost him mind. That is how he was defined. How are we defined. Are we willing to be defined by our worship of God, which is serious business, or do we want to be defined by something else? Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is serious business and worship has to be the primary task of being that disciple.

If we were to evaluate our worship here at FPC and especially if it is supposed to reflect the way in which we take our faith seriously what would we see? In 1993 we averaged 358 people between two worship services for the year. Every year since then, except one, it dropped until in 2010 we arrived at 163. We praise God that last year we increased by 20 from 2010. It isn’t just about numbers but our work as a church has to begin here, in this place, in our Father’s house on Sunday morning worship. We can have the best confirmation class in Lancaster County, and we do, we can have the best chili and we do, but if we are not bringing people to worship, if when we gather we aren’t focusing on the name of Jesus, then we are making this house of worship something other than it should be.

Saul in I Samuel did love God. But in our 1st Scripture he was waiting for Samuel to come and bless him before he went into battle, but Samuel delayed, God’s messenger delayed. The armies of the Philistines were increasing in number and some of his men were beginning to leave. He thought of a new way to summon God, but he knew it wasn’t God’s way. His focus was on how do I serve myself, not what does God want. Saul’s disobedience leads to the loss of his crown and to the anointing of David as his replacement.

What I see happening in our second service here at First Presbyterian is that we are getting a whole new group of people coming to worship at FPC that we have never had in the past. That worship has forced us to look away from what we want and what we can do to preserve our own, what will keep us inward looking, to how can we look out and reach those who would not normally step in the church. It has been painful and it continues to be painful. We have lost a number of families that would normally worship with us, but this is serious business, God does call us to reach out to all who have not heard of his name first and foremost and the most effective way and the most genuine way we can do that is through worship. Being responsible for a worship service is serious business.

In a couple of weeks you will be deciding on whether to buy the property on Funk street or not. Again, the possibilities that arise from that purchase allows us to look outside of ourselves and beyond to how can we lift up God’s name to the community.

I pray that this worship and our approach of one having a desire as a church will be that the zeal of the house of the Lord will consume us. I pray we will worry less about who is a member and who isn’t and focus on how do we reach out to the community so that the heart of the burrough will very clearly be First Presbyterian because it is consumed with the worship of Almighty God. Amen.